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March 11, 1968

Dr. James A. Shannon, Director
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, Maryland 20014

Dear Jim:

Last Friday, March 8, I testified before the Senate Subcommittee on Government Research. I am enclosing a copy of the initial presentation which I made at the hearing. Senator Ribicoff presided because Senator Harris had been called home by a family illness; Senator Mondale was present because he is the sponsor of S. J. Res. 145, the prime purpose of the hearing.

From the responses of the Senators and brief conversations with the Committee aides, Dr. Steven Ebbin and Dennis Brezina, I am more convinced than ever that Congress and the American people must be better informed of the importance of basic research in the service of man and relieved of the anxieties that this investment will beget a monster. How to do this?

We cannot rely on scientists. They are with rare exceptions not suited, trained and/or interested. Scientists are, if anything, more self-centered and less concerned with broader social issues that affect their work than people in most any other craft or profession. You can start a fire down the hall but as long as the flames are not licking at his door, the serious scientist will ignore it and keep on working.

We cannot rely on scientific societies either. From my brief exposure to executive responsibility in the American Society of Biological Chemists a few years ago, I was impressed by the strong traditional aversion to matters other than publishing a journal and conducting scientific meetings. It seems unlikely that these societies will develop the collective common sense that longshoremen and football players have displayed in hiring full-time professional talent to represent their needs and aspirations to the public.

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It seems to me the only solution rests with the NIH, the NSF, the NAS and other federal and private agencies of great stature. Some way must be found by them to train and employ full-time professional talent to mobilize scientists and non-scientist leaders who share the conviction that research and education, supported in the broadest way, here and abroad, is the soundest dollar investment the American taxpayer can make. If ten percent of the time and intelligence that scientists give freely in service on panels and councils were directed to the mission of informing Congress, the news media and the public, we'd be home.

I know that what I say in this letter is something you have recognized and promoted for a long time. I just wanted you to know that others of us are beginning to appreciate these facts and feel a sense of urgency that your efforts be supported and expanded.

With kindest regards,

Sincerely,

Arthur Kornberg

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